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DAVID CANEK

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In this paper I will trace the development of public policy in education pertaining to major ethnic minorities in Czechoslovakia and, after 1992, the Czech and Slovak Republics. The primary focus here is the Romany ethnic group. However, a great deal of attention is also paid to other minorities. It will, I hope, become apparent that the sole treatment of Roma could prove to be insufficiently revealing. The various policies whose target was the Romany ethnic group were always deployed in a context of measures designed for other minorities.

In addition to addressing public policy related to minorities in schooling, actual educational achievements of members of the various ethnic groups will also be of interest. Finally, a particular attention is paid to the democratic transition of 1989 as well as to the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and to the ways ethnic minorities were affected by these occurrences.

Pre-Communist Czechoslovakia (1945-1947)

Liberation of Czechoslovakia and the New Situation for Ethnic Minorities

With the defeat of Nazi Germany, Czechoslovakia was reestablished in its prewar geographic dimensions (except for its most eastern part – Carpatho-Ukraine – which was handed over to the Soviet Union soon after the liberation). Like before the war, the country had a substantial proportion of minorities. This was in particular the German minority in the border areas of the Czech lands and the Magyar minority in southern Slovakia. In addition, there were, of course, the Roma and several smaller groups such as the Poles and Rusyns. I will not be preoccupied with the Jewish minority in this paper since the tradition of Jewish self-identification as a national minority was rather weak in Czechoslovakia. Czech and Slovak Jewry, like Jewish communities in the West, strived more or less for assimilation rather than for the status of a national minority.[1] They have defined themselves as a religious community rather than as a national group.

The defeat of national socialist Germany brought about a series of most radical shifts for everyone, members of minorities not excluding. For the Roma (for those who survived) it signified an end to racial persecution by the Nazis. Tables turned also for members of the German minority in Czechoslovakia, who had enjoyed preferential treatment during the war, yet after it they were in a number of cases exposed to harsh treatment, even physical violence committed by retaliating Czechs. The position of the Magyar minority in Slovakia was also rather insecure, though not as vulnerable as that of Germans in the Czech lands.

In their speeches delivered after liberation of the country, leading Czechoslovak politicians made it clear that the status of minorities (especially of those of non-Slavic origin) in the reestablished state would differ significantly from what was their situation during the prewar period. Before the war, Czechoslovakia, like other East European countries that emerged from World War I, was bound by an international treaty not only to treat members of national minorities as equal citizens, but moreover to grant them specific linguistic rights which mainly concerned the areas of communication with officials and education. Commitment to such provisions in favor of minorities varied among East European states. Though far from perfect, prewar Czechoslovakia was one of the countries which treated its national minorities quite generously. This was to change after Word War II, at least for some of the minority groups.

Transfer and Assimilation: Policy for the German and Magyar Minorities

As I have already indicated, the status of the German and Magyar minorities in Czechoslovakia after liberation grew extremely insecure. Before the war members of these ethnic groups, who numbered 3.3 and 0.6 million in 1930 respectively, enjoyed international protection that was incorporated into domestic legislation. For instance, the German minority, as Wolfgang Mitter put it, had enjoyed a "highly developed education system"[2] which included an extensive network of pre-school, primary, secondary educational institutions and even a university where German was the language of instruction. Similar conditons existed for the Magyar minority.

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[1] The truth is, however, that Jews had the status of a national minority before World War II in Czechoslovakia which was not the case after 1945.

[2] Mitter (1991), p. 214.

After May 1945 these minorities could rely neither on foreign nor on Czechoslovak sources of support that would be comparable to the prewar era. At the international level, advocacy for group rights of national minorities basically disappeared. Instead, the new concept of human rights and the principle of non-discriminaiton received support which intentionally did not reflect on ethnic differencies within peoples.[3] It was introduced in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[4] Before the adoption of this Declaration transfers of, primarily, large numbers of German-speakers from several East European countries took place with the approval of the Allies. Perhaps these transfers were thought of as the last word in the collective treatment of minorities.

On a domestic level in Czechoslovakia, especially the German and also the Magyar minority were perceived as traitors of the Czechoslovak Republic. Czechs in particular expressed resentment towards the German minority for the support it had given to Nazi Germany and to the desctruction of prewar Czechoslovakia. Although Czechoslovak legal system was resurrected after liberation as a whole, the extensive provisions concerning linguistic rights of national minorities were not enforced. Moreover, members of the two minorities were deprived of Czechoslovak citizenship by a decree of President Edvard Beneš, issued on 2 August 1945. Only those who could prove to have engaged in resistance against the country's enemies were allowed to retain the citizenship.

The removal of citizenship was the initial step in the preparation for the transfer of these minorities to German-speaking countries and Hungary respectively. Throughout World War II leading Czechoslovak politicians, namely Edvard Beneš, were setting the ground diplomatically for such a resolution of the minority issue. It was argued that coexistence of Czechs and Slovaks with these minorities was impossible. Czechoslovak officials could not, of course, decide on the fate of Germans and Magyars on their own. Anything that would take place would have to be agreed upon by the Allies. Thus, Czechoslovak representatives in exile produced a number of documents on the postwar status of minorites in Czechoslovakia. These were not always cosistent with one another. Nor were they consistent with what happened after the war.

For instance, in a 1943 document handed over to Soviet officials by Beneš it was stated that the languages of instruction in postwar Czechoslovak schools would be Czech, Slovak and Ukrainian. A memorandum submitted to western Allies in 1944 on the other hand suggested that children of German nationality would be educated in their mother-tongue in Czechoslovak elementary schools after the end of war.[5] This, however, did not materialize.

On 7 June 1945 the closing of all German-language schools including institutions for the physically and mentally handicapped was announced by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education.[6] Most children of German nationality were, of course, expelled with their parents and their education took place later on abroad. As for those pupils of German nationality who were allowed to stay in the Czech lands, the whole situation was quite chaotic in the first postwar years. A part of the remaining German-speakers was concentrated in various types of camps in which education was sometimes provided to their offspring. Children of those staying outside these camps would attend Czech-language schools. In any case, education in German was not provided. In 1947, after the completion of the transfer of the over 3 million Sudeten Germans, there were 16,077 pupils of German nationality in elementary schools of the Czech lands.[7] This was, of course just a tiny fraction of its prewar equivalent which had amounted to 315,581 in 1935.[8]

While the primary goal of the postwar minority settlement for Czechoslovak politicians was to expell the German minority, an identical measure was devised for the Magyar ethnic group. Only its promotion was not as energetic. Also, resentment against the Magyar minority in Slovakia seems to have been less intense in comparison to attitudes of Czechs towards Germans in the Czech lands after

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[3] The prewar system of minority protection, which rested on group rights, was abused by Nazi Germany in its efforts to dismantle Czechoslovakia and Poland via the German minorities there. That was one of the main reasons for its replacement.

[4] See Kymlicka (1995), p. 3.

[5] See Stanek (1991), p. 33 and p. 44–5.

[6] Stanek (1991), p. 80.

[7] *Zprávy úradu statistického republiky Ceskoslovenské* (1948), p. 1099–1101.

[8] Mitter (1991), p. 217.

World War II.[9] Eventually, in October 1946 the Allies decided not to grant their consent to the transfer of the Magyar minority from Czechoslovakia.

This left Czechoslovak authorities with several other measures which were aimed at reducing the number of Hungarian-speakers in the country. Czechoslovakia and Hungary signed an agreement in February 1946 according to which members of the Magyar minority were to be exchanged for members of the Slovak minority group in Hungary. In this way the Magyar ethnic group in Slovakia decreased by about 65,000. Yet another measure was the so-called "reslovakization". This was bacically an attempt to assimilate the Magyar minority in Slovakia. "Reslovakization" committees accepted about 340,000 applications (out of a total of 400,000) from Magyars and recognized them as ethnic Slovaks. In this way these persons were regranted Czechoslovak citizenship. Approximately 44,000 Magyars from Slovakia were forcibly "recruited" to work in the Czech lands. Its goal was, of course, to dilute the concentration of the Magyar minority in southern Slovakia and in this way to speed up its assimilation.

After Czechoslovakia's liberation, instruction in Hungarian language ceased to be provided. Indeed, the hope of many Czechoslovak politicians at that time was that Hungarian-speaking children would soon be transferred abroad with their parents, and because of that the education system would not even have to deal with these minority pupils – an idea which materialized only in case of children of German nationality. Measures aimed at the Magyar minority in Slovakia in the immediate years after World War II certainly did not sustain or even tolerate their ethnic culture. Thus, the non-existence of schooling in Hungarian language was fully consistent with the general policy towards this minority. Things only began to change in 1948, when the Czechoslovak Communist Party seized absolute power in the country.

The Ethnic Revival: The Rusyn/Ukrainian and Polish Minorities

When compared to the situation of other minorities in Czechoslovakia, one can certainly speak of an ethnic revival of the Rusyn and Polish minorities in the immediate period following World War II.[10] In the Rusyn case one has to, however, be careful with definitions. The Rusyn minority, residing in north-east Slovakia, was (and continues to be) split between a Rusyn and Ukrainian branch. While the former is a grouping embedded in a very particular regional dialect and culture, and linked with the Greek Orthodox Church, the latter is simply embedded in Ukrainian culture.

Although both of these groups are of common descent, passionate enmity separates them. Although the Rusyn branch was the majority after World War II, Czechoslovak officials preferred to support the opposing Ukrainian branch.[11] This gave rise to an absurd situation. There was the Ukrainian Educational Department at the Ministry of Education, the Ukrainian Educational Council but hardly anybody spoke Ukrainian there. The language of communication among ordinary Rusyns was the Rusyn dialect (derived from Russian) and Rusyn intellectuals spoke simply Russian.[12] The resolution to this paradoxical situation took place only later, in the 1950s which I will address below.

The support that Czechoslovak authorities gave to the Ukrainian minority in eastern Slovakia was due to the following. One, a great number of members of the Rusyn/Ukrainian minority joined resistance groups which fought against Hitler. Therefore, the minority was not perceived as a traitor of Czechoslovakia unlike the German and Magyar minorities. Second, as a country which was liberated by the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia certainly did not wish to oppress the Ukrainian minority, as it was understood, which culturally stemmed from the Soviet Union. And one also has to bear in mind that Soviet officials perceived the Rusyn minority as essentially Ukrainian, this was the official understanding in the Soviet Union too.

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[9] Cierna-Lantayová (1993), p. 19.

[10] There existed some Rusyn-language schools in Slovakia during World War II. After it they multiplied.

[11] The Rusyn minority was considered a subethnic grouping. Moreover, it seemed plausible to the officials to support the Ukrainian branch of the minority since the territory of Ukraine was the group's actual origin.

[12] Haraksim (1993), p. 74–5.

The Romany Minority: Equality or Work Camps?

After Czechoslovakia's liberation Roma were free from Nazi persecution. While the Czech lands lost almost all of their Roma during World War II, most of Slovakia's Romany community survived. Indeed, the Czech lands before the war had a very tiny Romany minority, while it was eastern Slovakia where most Roma concentrated.

Although racial discrimination was prohibited immediately after 1945, Roma were often subject to discriminatory treatment not only by individuals but also by a number of state agencies. According to Jurová, Roma were even sent to work camps in Slovakia.[13] And some officials in central Czechoslovak institutions proposed to introduce work camps for Roma as a countrywide policy. Such proposals were, however, turned down.[14] Truth is that the 1927 discriminatory law against vagrant Roma was still effective and some of its provisions were enforced.

While a clear countrywide policy towards Roma was missing in the immediate postwar period, local officials would apply various provisions from the past that discriminated against Roma. In Slovakia this even included modified versions of such provision that originated from World War II.

Roma had not been included into the prewar system of minority protection in Czechoslovakia and there were only very few voices that questioned this traditional approach to Roma in the immediate postwar years. With the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans and the efforts to assimilate the Magyar minority, there were not many resources left to state administration that could be devoted to dealing with the country's Roma.

In a 1947 census on Roma, in fact the only countrywide accomplishment of the state in regard to Roma in this period, 84,438 members of this ethnic group were recorded in Slovakia and 16,752 were registered in the Czech lands. The information available on Roma in schools is extremely scarce in this period. We only know that single specialized schools were established for those Roma in the Czech lands who came from Slovakia. Based on what is known about Roma's situation in the 1950s, it can be assumed that many Romany children in eastern Slovakia did not attend school at all in the immediate postwar years. Illiteracy among Roma was quite common.

Ethnic Minorities in Czech and Slovak Schools under Communism

Ethnic Groups under Communism in Czechoslovakia

The communist takeover of February 1948 in Czechoslovakia brought along a new situation for ethnic minorities. While the West became the advocate of human rights which were, essentially, rights of individuals, communist ideology rested heavily on group patterns. The fundamental division between groups was, of course, class and not ethnnicity. For a number of reasons it made sense for communist officials to extend group privileges also to some ethnic minorities.

The international factor was an important one. It is known that, for instance, Hungary has successfully lobbied for the introduction of some specific cultural accommodation for the Magyar minority in Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, domestic factors were also important. It seems that communist officials were quite instrumental at winning political loyalty of ethnic minorities in exchange for the provision of special linguistic rights to ethnic groups.

The communist regime, having been a totalitarian system of government, did not have to fear popular protest of the majority population against the introduction of minority group rights. Given these conditions, in particular the Magyar minority in southern Slovakia experienced a most energetic development of Hungarian-language schools after 1948. Minority provisions for the Polish and Ukrainian (but not the Rusyn) ethnic groups flourished also. Roma received more attention (in a positive as well as negative sense) from the 1950s on.

One can say that minority policy under communism grew ever more inclusive and extensive. In the immediate postwar period only the Ukrainian/Rusyn and Polish minorities could boast of minority schools. After the communist takeover of 1948 the Magyar minority also received the privilege of minority schools and other linguistic rights. By 1969 the German minority was officially recognized in Czechoslovakia. Perhaps a little bit odd was that the numerous Slovak minority in the

[13] Jurová (1993), p. 22.

[14] Grulich and Haišman (1986), p. 82.

Czech lands as well as the Czech minority in Slovakia were only partially included in the scheme of protection for national minorities – in a sense they were not perceived as minorities.

The expansion of minority policy can also be observed from the constitutional development in Czechoslovakia. While the 1948 Constitution mentioned no minorities, in the 1960 Constitution the Magyar, Ukrainian and Polish ethnic groups were declared as officially recognized national minorities. The new Constitution of 1969 not only added the German minority to those officially recognized. It also formally expanded the extent of minority rights. From then on minorities were to be represented in elected bodies according to their proportion in the general population.

In the following section I would at first like to address the development of nationality policy towards minorities that later became the officially recognized minority groups. At the end of this section I would like to address the development of policy towards the Roma in Czechoslovakia. In this way it will be possible to compare the different approaches. On one hand there were the officially recognized minorities with their linguistic rights and on the other hand there were the Roma with no such minority rights.

The Polish Minority

As I have already indicated, the resurrection of Polish minority schools in northern Moravia was initialized in the immediate postwar period. After the settlement of some bilateral controversies over the Těšín region between Poland and Czechoslovakia a Treaty on Friendship and Mutual Aid was signed by the two countries in 1947 which also enhanced the progress of Polish minority schools.[15] The diverse structure of these schools reaching from kindergartens to educational institutions at the secondary level was not an invention of the communist regime itself. The tradition of highly developed schooling in Polish language reaches back into the Czechoslovak state of the interwar period.[16] In any case communist officials strongly promoted Polish minority schools after 1948 when they seized power in Czechoslovakia. This was greeted by members of the Polish minority who resolutely demanded Polish-language schooling.

The Polish ethnic group of northern Moravia is concentrated mainly in the Těšín region which borders on Poland and can be described as a historical (autochthonous) minority residing on an enclosed territory. The fact that members of the Polish minority in the Těšín region live next to Poland helps them to maintain their ethnic culture yet on the other hand the circumstance had caused a repeated security risk for the Czechoslovak state. Similarly as Nazi Germany used Sudeten Germans to help it destroy Czechoslovakia, Poland used the Polish minority for its efforts to annex the Těšín region. The dispute over the Těšín area, which in the end stayed a Czechoslovak, and later Czech territory, was settled only after a diplomatic intervention of the Soviet Union following World War II.

The prevalence of friendly relations between the two neighbouring states of the communist bloc, Poland and Czechoslovakia, from the 1950s on was also reflected in the generous treatment of the Polish minority in northern Moravia, as far as education is concerned. The Czechoslovak and, after the federalization of 1969, Czech Ministry of Education funded not only kindergartens, elementary[17] and secondary schools with Polish as the language of instruction but also appropriate textbooks and periodicals for use in the classroom. Naturally, the price was a complete loyalty to the communist regime as in Czech-language schools.

Polish minority schools experienced its highest postwar enrolment in 1961. Since then 1961 Polish medium schools have experienced a steady decline of both schools as well as pupils. Its main cause has been the insufficient reproduction of the Polish minority. Other, minor, factors that influenced the structure of Polish-language schools were of an administrative kind. Thus, there were two causes of the setback of Polish minority schools in the postwar period: a) demographic; b) administrative. I would like to address briefly both of these.

While before World War II almost as many as 80 per cent of marriages that persons of Polish nationality entered were ethnically homogenous in the Czech lands, in the early 1950s intermarriages

[15] Šindelka (1975) p. 118–123.

[16] Šrajerová, 'Národnostné školstvo na Tešínsku' (1996), p. 143.

[17] *Elementary school* included nine and from 1978 eight grades that were extended to nine again in 1990.

prevailed with 54.6 per cent.[18] Ever since, the proportion of Poles who entered a mixed marriage has been – with the exception of single years – on a steady rise. In 1990, only 22.5 per cent of marriages that Poles entered were ethnically homogenous.[19] Obviously, mixed marriages prove to be a powerful means of assimilation which affects not only the concerned spouses but also their offspring. It also follows that assimilation toward the dominant culture, i.e. Czech, is more frequent than toward its minority counterpart. Thus, generally, mixed marriages bring about a reduction of a minority and the Polish ethnic group in the Czech lands is no exception therein.

Between 1950 and 1991 the Polish minority reduced by 16.1 per cent and the proportion of children within this ethnic group dropped from 21 to 10,3 per cent between 1961 and 1991.[20] While demographic factors are decisive, I think, in the steady decrease of Polish minority schools in the Czech lands, administrative measures may slow down or enhance the process. It has to be stressed that the system of Polish minority schooling was extraordinarily well developed in socialist Czechoslovakia and it continues to be in smooth operation in the independent Czech Republic, too. However, school statistics reveal that the number of Polish-language elementary schools dropped abruptly in the second half of the 1970s. It is clear that the decrease exceeded the demographic decline of children of Polish nationality at that time (see Table). The setback cannot, however, be interpreted as an attack on Polish medium schools – it resulted from a government decision on the gradual abolition of small schools which also included a number where Polish was the language of instruction.[21]

It is interesting to see how pupils of Polish nationality and their parents struggled with the decrease of Polish-language schools in the second half of the 1970s (see Table # 13). While the proportion of pupils of Polish nationality educated in Polish decreased in 1975 and 1976, in 1977 it increased again and almost reached its position from the early 1970s. Thus, from the statistical evidence available it can be concluded that pupils from closed Polish-language schools in most cases transferred to those Polish minority schools that remained in operation. This must have meant an increased necessity to commute for the affected pupils since the network of Polish minority schools lost its previous density. The fact that pupils of Polish nationality and their parents did not turn their backs on Polish minority schools brings further evidence on the strong ability and will of Polish minority members to resist assimilation.

The Magyar Minority

The Magyar minority has a lot in common with the Polish minority. It shares a tradition of a highly developed network of minority educational institutions (including kindergardens, primary and secondary schools) from prewar Czechoslovakia. Unlike the not very numerous Polish minority, the Magyar ethnic group, the greatest minority in Slovakia, has always had a significant political power. Its members concentrate in southern Slovakia where in many communities they are the majority.

After World War II, the situation of the Magyar minority grew very dramatic when Czechoslovak authorities requested transfer of 200,000 of its members to Hungary. The loyalty of the Magyar minority to Czechoslovakia appeared questionable to many Czech and Slovak representatives. Resentment towards the Magyar minority was, however, less intense when compared to resentment towards the German minority. This and the refusal of the transfer by the Allies in case of the Magyar minority meant that Czechoslovak politicians had to deal with members of this minority in domestic politics.

The communist takeover of 1948 in Czechoslovakia signified a very radical shift in the situation of the Magyar minority. The Government decided on 30 September 1948 that persons of the Magyar ethnic group who held Czechoslovak citizenship before 1 November 1938 would be considered Czechoslovak citizens. Measures to dilute the concentration of the Magyar minority in southern Slovakia so as to bring about assimilation, such as forcible “recruitment” for jobs in the Czech lands ceased.

[18] Ziegenfuss (1966), p. 29–30.
[19] Sokolová (1994), p. 272.
[20] Šrajerová (1996), p. 145.
[21] See Resolution of Czech government No. 301/1972 of 8 November 1972.

Thus, in 1948 the policy of Czechoslovak authorities shifts from overt assimilation of the Magyar minority to the protection of its language and culture. As Table # 15 shows, the expansion of Hungarian-language schools was enormous in the 1950s. Because of such a swift pace serious problems appeared. For instance, throughout the 1950s there was an acute shortage of qualified teachers. In 1949 Csemadok was founded, a Magyar cultural association in Czechoslovakia which became a very fruitful minority organization.. Also, from the 1950s on officials watched very closely the representation of Magyar minority members in local and central elected as well as executive bodies in order to prevent underrepresentation.

One can hardly imagine that there was sufficient support for such extensive measures in favor of the Magyar minority. Indeed, Slovak–Magyar relations were by no means unproblematic. One has to bear in mind that Hungarian officials in the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy practised a severe policy of assimilation in regard to the Slovak-speaking population in what is today Slovakia. Also, the Slovak minority in the 20th century Hungary has never had a comparable network of minority educational institutions such as the one of the Magyar ethnic group in Czechoslovakia. This is a frequent criticism that Slovaks direct against Hungary.

One of the core values for the Magyar minority in Slovakia is without doubt the Hungarian language. Surveys indicate that almost all Magyars in Slovakia declare Hungarian as their mother tongue. Like the Polish minority, the Hungarian-language schools experienced a significant setback in the 1970s. Most Magyars in Slovakia reside in small towns and villages. As a result of that Magyar minority schools were hit hard by the government campaign to decrease the number of small village schools. The reasons for such a policy were the following according to officials: the maintenance of small schools was costly; education in them was often below the national standard; communist ideals were insufficiently promoted in these small schools. The authorities, however, warned of all too abrupt closing of small village schools. They also underscored the necessity to consider the specific situation of minority schools while implementing the policy.[22]

Although it was not at all directed against minority schools, the policy of closing down small village schools was interpreted as an attack on their minority educational institutions by many Polish as well as Magyar activists. Truth is that as a result of the named policy the proportion of minority children actually educated in their mother tongue dropped. This was in particular true for the Magyar minority (see Table # 15).

That members of the Magyar ethnic group care a great deal about their minority schools is clear from their engagement in campaigns in favor of them. When, for instance, officials intended to introduce bilingual education as an additional option to Hungarian-language schools in 1978 and then again in 1984, they encountered resistance from Magyar parents. Eventually, the plans were dropped.

One of the apparent motives behind the ever emerging efforts to introduce bilingual education into Hungarian-language schools is the idea that members of the Magyar minority are not able to communicate in Slovak properly. And in this way by implication their loyalty to the state is questioned. The fact is that for a long time after the re-introduction of Hungarian-language schools in 1948 pupils of the Magyar minority were not able to communicate in Slovak adequately. This was to blame on the improper teaching methods that were used in Slovak-language classes in these minority schools. Up until 1957 Slovak was not taught there as a foreign language but as mother tongue which was, of course, a capital methodological mistake. It took more than one decade to provide the future teachers of Slovak in Hungarian-language schools, who studied at Slovak universities, with a special training suited the specific instruction in minority schools.

Unlike members of Polish nationality, Magyars in Slovakia have had continuous problems with underrepresentation as students at universities and colleges. This could be because of their inadequate knowledge of Slovak (there are no Hungarian-language universities in Slovakia). Or another explanation is that as a rural group members of the Magyar minority simply strive less for university education and do not even apply at these educational institutions.[23]

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[22] Resolution of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party of 13 March 1962.

[23] See, for instance, Gabzdilová (1991), p. 28–29.

The German minority

As Wolfgang Mitter pointed out, there is actually no continuity between the prewar and postwar German minority in the Czech lands.[24] And there is, consequently, no continuity between the prewar system of elementary, secondary schools, colleges and a university with German as the language of instruction and the postwar optional courses in German language that pupils of German nationality could attend from the early 1950s on in mainstream Czech elementary schools.

While official attitudes towards the remaining members of the German minority were rather hostile and their assimilation was openly promoted after 1945, the authorities modified their policy in the 1950s. One of the incentives for the change was the establishment of diplomatic relations with the German Democratic Republic in 1949. The improvement was not dramatic, however. The plan to assimilate the German minority had not been abandoned – only its promotion was no longer utterly open.

Policy towards the remnant of the German minority was much less inclusive in comparison to the Magyar minority. While Magyars were collectively regranted citizenship in 1948, the same measure came into effect five years later, in 1953, for the German minority.[25] While the Magyar minority remained concentrated in southern Slovakia, the German minority was dispersed by administrative measures throughout the Czech lands.[26] This rendered it incapable of resisting assimilation. Furthermore, hardly any members of the German minority in postwar Czechoslovakia dared to effectively maintain their ethnic culture which was, no doubt their reaction, to the general hostility to German culture in the country after World War II.

A very significant change came with the 1969 federalization of Czechoslovakia. The new constitutional Act on national minorities brought official recognition of the German minority. The Ministry of Education in 1971 issued a decree stipulating the exact conditions for setting up German minority schools and classes. None of these could, however, be established for an insufficient number of inrested parents at any one place. This was, of course, a consequence of the dispersal of this minority.[27]

The Rusyn/Ukrainian minority

The dilemma of how to resolve the conflict between the Rusyn and Ukrainian branch of the minority (or minorities), was taken up in a somewhat radical manner by communist officials in 1952. Leadership of the Slovak communist party decided that from then on the sole language of instruction in what was called Ukrainian minority schools, would be Ukrainian. This contradicted to the actual wishes of Rusyn parents who wanted their children to be taught Rusyn dialect or Russian at schools.

As a result of such a policy, the number of pupils enrolled in Ukrainian-language schools dropped dramatically in the 1950s and 1960s (see Table # 16). Rusyn parents decided to boycott Ukrainian-language schools and started assigning their children to mainstream Slovak schools.

The case of the Rusyn minority and its Ukrainization is interesting for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most significant for the purpose of this paper is the following. Communist officials refused to accept the Rusyn minority, essentially a subethnic group, with a language that was not used for the production of high culture. Support for such a group seemed impossible in the 1950s. The Roma were also considered a sub-ethnic group without high culture.

The Slovak and Czech Minorities

Unlike the Magyar, Polish, German and Ukrainian/Rusyn minorities, the Slovak minority in the Czech lands as well as the Czech minority in Slovakia cannot be described as autochthonous groups. Members of both of these minorities migrated to the Czech lands and Slovakia respectively only after Czechoslovakia came into existence. The Slovak minority in the Czech lands became over time the largest ethnic minority there and its position was quite exceptional in a number of aspects. The Czech minority in Slovakia, much less numerous than its Slovak counterpart.

[24] Mitter (1991), p. 211.
[25] Stanek (1993), p. 109.
[26] Stanek (1993), p. 68.
[27] Stanek (1993), p. 185.

I will be preoccupied only with the Slovak minority in the Czech lands here. The Slovak minority can serve as an interesting object of comparison with the Romany minority. Namely, today's Czech Roma almost all came from Slovakia. That is, the massive postwar migration of Roma to the Czech lands – in particular to its border areas which were left depopulated after the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans – was part of an even broader migration of Slovaks.

Unlike the Polish minority with its rich tradition of minority schools in the Czech lands, the Slovak ethnic group, an immigrant community, did not have a similar tradition of its own. Thus, while reopening Polish-language schools after the liberation meant simply a restoration of the prewar state, the concept of Slovak-language schools in the Czech lands had yet to be developed. The first Slovak minority school was opened in the city of Karviná in northern Moravia. Its establishment took the following course: At first two classes were opened for Slovak pupils within a mainstream Czech school in 1956. In 1957 parents of Slovak nationality filed a request with the local authority to establish a separate Slovak-language school. Yet the request was turned down. After a repeated demand, the first Slovak-language school was finally established in Karviná in 1958.[28]

In 1969 a second Slovak minority school opened in Karviná and by 1971 the number of pupils enrolled in Slovak-language schools – and there were only those two in Karviná – reached its highest peak ever in the Czech lands with 1,349 schoolboys and -girls. Around this time there were efforts to establish Slovak minority schools also in other cities of the Czech Socialist Republic including Prague with its relatively numerous community of Slovaks. The attempts were, however, either unsuccessful or its results were short-lived. Moreover, the second Slovak-language school of Karviná closed down in 1983 because of lack of pupils which left the Czech lands with only one school of such sort, also situated in Karviná.[29]

One can, indeed, speak of a decline of Slovak minority schooling which commenced in the second half of the 1970s and resulted in the closing of the Karviná Slovak-language school no. 2. One has to bear in mind, however, that in the Czech lands there has never been a strong and well developed network of Slovak minority schools in the first place. When in 1971 the number of pupils enrolled in Slovak-language schools reached its peak with 1,349 pupils, it was still negligible compared to the total of 40,190 pupils of Slovak nationality in the entire elementary education system of the Czech lands.

It would be wrong to think that central and local authorities in the Czech lands engaged in some kind of project of forced assimilation and refused to open Slovak-language schools. Although the Slovak ethnic group had not been recognized officially as a national minority until 1993, its members were actually treated as belonging to one in the Czech lands even before this date as far as education is concerned. This is particularly true for the period following the 1969 federalization of Czechoslovakia. For instance, a 1971 instruction of the Czech Ministry of Education on minority schooling applies not only to the officially recognized minorities but also and equally to pupils of Slovak nationality.[30]

The Slovak minority is dispersed literally all over the Czech lands which makes Slovak-language schooling difficult from a technical point of view. Territorial diffusion may not be decisive, however, since in some locations, for instance in Prague, the number of pupils of Slovak nationality would theoretically well suffice to establish a Slovak medium school. Past and present efforts to run a Slovak-language school in the Czech capital have, however, been futile in spite of the fact that the main if not all Slovak minority organisations have a seat there and their activity is concentrated in Prague to a significant extent. Indeed, it takes a fair amount of commitment to send one's children to a minority school. In a situation where there is a long tradition of Slovak migration to and assimilation in the Czech lands along with the wide acceptance of Slovaks by the majority society and given the similarity of Czech and Slovak languages, there is no wonder that Slovak parents have been content with sending their children to mainstream Czech schools.

Educational achievements of pupils and students of Slovak nationality seem to have been partly influenced by the specific conditions of their migration to the Czech lands. In particular the early migrants from Slovakia of the 1950s and early 1960s were mostly manual workers which

[28] Šrajerová (1996), p. 145.
[29] Šrajerová (1997a), p. 107–108.
[30] Guidelines of the Czech Ministry of Education of 11 October 1971.

decreased the average educational status of Slovaks in the Czech lands to a level lower than that of the general population. It was only later that Slovaks with higher educational status migrated in greater numbers to the Czech lands. However, even among younger persons of Slovak nationality there is a significantly larger proportion of those with only low educational accomplishments. This may be caused by the named historical reasons of Slovak migration to the Czech lands or it may also have to do with the fact that a significant proportion of Roma – who have very low educational status on average – go by Slovak nationality in censuses. The proportion of Slovaks under 30 years of age who have a university degree is on the other hand almost identical with that of the general population.[31]

The Romany Minority

Roma were not recognized officially as a national minority until after 1989. The issue of what status Roma should have in regard to the system of minority provisions keeps coming up throughout the history of public policy pertaining to national minorities in Czechoslovakia. It would be naive to suggest that simply granting Roma a "normal" status of a national minority would provide a solution to all of their severe problems ranging from racial discrimination to overproportional unemployment and educational underachievement. In fact Roma themselves have had to grapple with their own identity and this issue is quite complex.

Thus, it should be noted that there exists a strong tradition of not treating Roma as a national minority. Such a treatment of Roma was prevalent in many countries. What appears particularly striking, however, in the Czechoslovak case of the prewar as well as, to a lesser extent, of the postwar period is the contrast between the high degree of specific provisions established for national minorities and the non-existence of any such provisions for the Roma. In fact there was even a law which directly discriminated against this ethnic group.[32]

Let me give you some basic facts regarding this minority. While Roma in Slovakia are concentrated mainly in small villages in the east, in the Czech lands they reside mainly in industrial centres, medium and large cities. Czechoslovak Roma had been mainly sedentary already in the prewar period and in fact already in the 19th century. Social division between Roma and non-Roma seems to be substantial and relatively persistent. This is evidenced by a number of public opinion polls as well as by some demographic factors. The Romany minority, the only "visible" minority in Czechoslovakia, was characteristic by relatively high fertility and low number of intermarriages. Its demographic structcture was quite exceptional. For instance in 1966 a survey recorded that the percentage of children (under 15 years of age) within the ethire Romany community in Czechoslovakia was 45.5 %. Meanwhile, the general population had an almost opposing demographic structure.[33]

In 1948, when the communists seized power in Czechoslovakia, it seems that many Roma along with other minorities, greeted the political change since it gave some hope of improvement to them. Indeed, the immediate situation of Roma got better. For instance in the late 1940s a number of provisions which did not adhere to the principle of equal treatment and affected Roma were nullified in Slovakia. In 1950 the 1927 law which discriminated against Roma and which was still in force in the postwar years, was rendered ineffective.[34]

The 1950s (at least until 1958) saw a commitment to Roma's assimilation through non-violent methods. Assimilation and "re-education" or "civilization" of Roma seems to have been a default option in the early 1950s. Some, such as the Czechoslovak Creative Writers' Association, however, protested against such a policy and requested that Roma be treated as other national minorities.[35] Still, this voice did not prevail in that period.

The situation of Roma was disastrous in a number of aspects. A problem particular to Slovakia were the terrible housing conditions of many Roma who lived in the so-called "osady", exclusively Romany communities which resemble slums. These did not exist in the Czech lands, for Roma were

[31] See Hernová (1997b), p. 59.

[32] Czechoslovak Law no. 117 of 1927. This law limited the freedom of movement for "Gypsies and other travellers with a Gypsy life-style".

[33] Srb (1967), p. 279.

[34] Jurová (1993), p. 28.

[35] Jurová (1993), p. 35.

provided with standard housing upon their arrival in the various industrial centers there. In the mid-1950s there were still 1,305 "osady" which had 14,935 houses harboring 95,000 Roma. Eighty per cent of these houses were utterly inadequate for living. For instance, floors were made of dirt, there was no supply of drinking water, no sewerage system existed.[36]

Roma had very low educational achievements on average. Illiteracy among them was quite common in a situation in which it was almost non-existant within the non-Romany population. For instance a survey carried out in six districts of eastern Slovakia in 1955 revealed that 80 percent of the Roma there were illiterate.[37] Although such a high percentage was not representative for the entire Romany community in Czechoslovakia, it gives one an idea of what the extent of the problem really was.

It was more than clear that such a deep division between Roma and non-Roma in Czechoslovakia could hardly be just tackled by a policy of non-discrimination. There was a number of small measures that were carried out to improve the standing of the Romany community. For instance, literacy and other courses were organized for adult Roma. Special classes were open for Romany children who never attended school. In 1952 a decree of the Ministry of Interior on Roma also included a section on the education of Romany children. It stipulated that "Gypsy children are to be assigned to national or intermediate schools with other children". In other words the educational policy was to be one of integration. On the other hand special schools and classes for Romany children only could be set up in cases where immediate integration was not possible.

The latter formed a part of the network of schools for children with special educational needs. In any case, the ministerial decree pointed out that the assignment of Romany pupils to such schools must be only temporary with the aim to achieve integration in a mainstream school as soon as possible.[38] These schools for Roma were, of course, not comparable to other minority educational institutions. The language of instruction there was Czech and the reason for their establishment was to collect "neglected" Romany children in order to teach them some basic skills that were considered necessary for school attendance.

Some Czech and Slovak teachers criticized the practice of assigning Romany pupils to schools for the intellectually deficient and pointed out that the affected Romany pupils were in most cases actually not intellectually deficient. The reasons why they were assigned to such schools were perhaps the following: their knowledge of Czech and Slovak was poor and/or they lacked various basic skills which other children had upon enrolment in an elementary school. In addition, their class attendance was irregular as a teacher reported.[39] This practice (assigning Roma to schools for the intellectually deficient) was to become very typical under communism. I will address it later in a greater detail.

It would be wrong to think that the communist authorities disregarded the problem of schooling Roma. In the course of the communist rule a number of measures were adopted that were meant to improve the position of Roma in the education system. For instance, it was believed that placing Romany children in kindergartens prior to their enrolment in a school would increase their future educational chances. Thus, preference to be placed in a kindergarten was granted to children from Romany families in some areas and as far as pre-school education is concerned, some significant achievements were made. Also, the number of illiterate Roma in the postwar generation decreased significantly. Still, the overall situation was not good at all.

Statistical evidence from 1970 shows that the proportion of Roma in the postwar generation (16–30 years of age) with at least some secondary education was only 1.7 per cent.[40] Many Romany pupils were not even able to complete an elementary school. In 1970 only about 15 per cent of them reached the last – 9th – grade. Others dropped out before that.[41] A significant proportion of Roma was enrolled in schools for the intellectually deficient. Comprehensive statistical evidence documenting this is available from the late 1960s to 1990 (see Tables # 8 and 11).

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[36] Jurová (1993), p. 44.
[37] Jurová (1993), p. 42.
[38] Regulation of the Situation of Persons of Gypsy Origin, a decree of 5 March 1952.
[39] Říhová-Kunová (1949), p. 187.
[40] "Povinná školní docházka cikánské mládeže v CSR v letech 1970–1971" (1972), p. 2.
[41] Srb and Job (1974), p. 179.

A dramatic increase – proportional as well as absolute – of Roma in schools for the intellectually deficient in the course of the late 1970s and the 1980s was due to a major educational reform introduced in 1976. The duration of the elementary school was cut by one year to eight years total. In addition, the curriculum became more difficult. Consequently, demands on pupils increased and after the reform's inception those who could just make it through in the elementary school before 1976 were often sent to a school for the intellectually deficient. It can be argued that this reform – condemned by many Czech and Slovak teachers as well as educational experts – caused an enormous setback in the accomplishments of Romany pupils and erased a lot of what had been achieved prior to 1976.

While before the reform the proportion of Roma in schools for the intellectually deficient was actually decreasing in some parts of Czechoslovakia (especially in the Czech lands), with its inception it started rising dramatically. By the mid 1980s almost every other Romany child attended such a school in the Czech lands while before the reform it was not even every fourth. This was, of course, an enormous proportion. In Slovakia the proportion of Roma in schools for the intellectually deficient also rose after 1976, yet in comparison it was still much lower than in the Czech lands. This was not due to a more liberal policy towards the Roma in Slovakia. Its sole reason was the "underdevelopment" (according to officials) of the network of special schools for the intellectually deficient in Slovakia.

Although the communist authorities stressed the importance of a highly educated society as a whole, from an economic point of view it made only very little or no difference at all whether an individual had a university degree or was a graduate of a school for the intellectually deficient. Socialist Czechoslovakia along with some other countries of the communist bloc had very small disparities between wages for manual and intellectual work.[42] In fact unqualified manual work on constructions was often rewarded higher than one for which a qualification was necessary. This created an environment unknown to capitalist societies. Those with very little education could make very good earnings. A 1972 survey carried out in the northern Bohemian city of Most with substantial Romany population showed that the salary of only 15 per cent of the Roma there – mainly women – was below average. Almost 50 per cent of them earned above average.[43]

Such a situation in earnings did not, of course, stimulate motivation within the Romany community to strive for higher educational status. Although communist officials repeatedly declared that a highly educated society was a priority for them, they seemed not very much alarmed by the ever increasing number of pupils who were placed in schools for the intellectually deficient. This rise was not perceived as disturbing, on the contrary it was described as "favourable" by the ministry of education (implying: "look at how many resources we are willing to allocate for the intellectually deficient").[44] It also seems that officials were not alarmed by the increasing segregation of Roma in these schools in the late 1970s and the 1980s. Such an attitude contrasted with the concern about overproportional representation of Roma in schools for the intellectually deficient which communist authorities voiced frequently in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Arrival of Democracy in 1989 and the Dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992

The Polish Minority

The democratic revolution of 1989 affected the educational system significantly in a number of aspects. Polish-language elementary schools stayed, however, intact. The proportion of pupils of Polish nationality who were educated before and after 1989 in Polish-language elementary schools has basically stayed the same. The number of these schools has not decreased since 1989. The negative demographic development of the Polish minority in the Czech lands, however, persists and the number of pupils of Polish nationality in the entire education system constantly decreases.

It also seems that individual members of the Polish minority did not suffer any special damages in the course of the transition period if compared, for instance, to the Romany minority (see

[42] Vecerník (1998), p. 41.
[43] Kára (1975), p. 310.
[44] *Analýza ceskoslovenské výchovne vzdelávací soustavy* (1988), p. 45.

below). The educational achievements of pupils and students of Polish nationality have been for some 20 years or so comparable to the accomplishments of the general population. Thus, the Polish minority – in particular its members born after the 1960s – were no less prepared for the transition to market economy than the general population as far as their educational status is concerned.[45] The break-up of Czechoslovakia at the turn of 1992 and 1993 left them unaffected as well.

The Magyar Minority

The numerous Magyar ethnic group was in 1989 Czechoslovakia the only minority with real political power – one which was extremely well organized. Magyar political parties were able to win substantial support from voters in each general election that took place in Slovakia after 1989. Their election gains have always roughly corresponded to the proportion of the Magyar minority in the general population of Slovakia.

While in the 1970 and 80s, under communism, a sort of a status quo existed in the Slovak – Magyar relations, 1989 challenged the peaceful state. Under communism, individuals and groups or organizations except for the Communist Party did not have almost any political power. Thus, it was in a sense easier to regulate inter-ethnic relations under a totalitarian regime than under democracy.

Soon after 1989 issues of language in Slovakia entered the political arena. Ethnic Slovak politicians went on to assert the rights of the Slovak majority in Slovakia at the expense of the lingustic and cultural rights of the Magyar minority. Laws were adopted by Slovak parliament, for instance, laws on official language in 1990 and 1993 that many members of the Magyar ethnic group perceived as an attack on their own language and culture. Both of these laws tried to curtail in some way the the relatively extensive linguistic group rights that the Magyar minority had under communism.

After the split of Czechoslovakia, the Magyar minority was at the mercy of the Slovak majority, without the protection of the more impartial Czechoslovak federal structures. So, for instance, traffic signs (names of towns in Hungarian) were removed in 1993 and replaced with their Slovak counterparts by the Slovak Ministry of Transportation. Or in 1996 the Ministry of Education stopped issuing school certificates for minority students in their language of instruction. All of them were to be issued in Slovak. The Ministry tried to introduce bilingual education to Hungarian-language only schools. This as well as the issuing of Slovak-language school certificates for minority pupils met with fierce protests of parents. Eventually, the plan for bilingual education was dropped by the Ministry and school certificates in minority languages came back in 1999 with the new Slovak administration that also includes Magyar political parties.

Magyar politicians have been, after 1989, very instrumental at making use of the international concern for national minorities. Indeed, the 1990s saw a sort of a comeback of the idea of group rights and specific protection for national minorities. It has been acknowledged in practice as well as in theory that human rights themselves will not do the job for national minorities. For instance, before the independent Slovak Republic was accepted as a member of the Council of Europe it had to promise to adhere to the principles of the Council's recommendation no. 1201 concerning the protection of national minorities.[46] There was a number of other instances in which Magyar politicians used international pressure in the battle for minority rights in Slovakia.

The Rusyn and Ukrainian Minorities

After 1989 the policy towards the Rusyn/Ukraininan minority changed significantly. From then on not only the Ukrainian branch but also the Rusyn orientation was officially recognized. This opened up a way to the establishment of Rusyn cultural organizations as well as to the establishment of Rusyn-language schools.

The Rusyn and Ukrainian minorities are politically quite insignificant in comparison to the Magyar minority, for instance. What may of interest in case of the Rusyn minority is that a culture has been recognized that used to be describe as subethnic in the past.

[45] See Hernová (1997b), p. 59.

[46] Homišinová and Šutaj (1994), p. 97.

Experts from Slovakia as well as from abroad commenced to work on a standardized form of the Rusyn language in 1992. By 1995 the task was completed and the birth of a new written Slavic language was announced.[47] Subsequently, there were efforts to establish schools with Rusyn as the language of instruction. A survey was carried out in order to determine how many parents would like their children to attend such schools. Consequently, 12 schools were identified. After the actual inception of the project of Rusyn-language instruction only half of the parents were really interested. Thus, Rusyn-language was introduced at only 6 schools.

The case of the innumerous Rusyn minority shows that it was possible in post 1989 Slovakia not only to recognize minorities that were previously perceived as "real" national national minorities but also to introduce minority education for them. Indeed, a comparison could be drawn with the Romany minority. Before 1989 it was also regarded as a subethnic group. After the democratic changes it received official recognition. The difference is that no schools with Romany as the language of instruction were introduced in Slovakia (nor in the Czech lands) which could, however, hardly be charachterized as a fault of the administrations. Roma simply did not want their own minority schools (see below).

The Slovak Minority

It seems that Slovaks in the Czech lands were not affected by the transition period in a way much different than the majority.[48] They were hit, however, significantly by the break-up of Czechoslovakia at the end of 1992, in particular by the difficulties with obtaining the new Czech citizenship for which the Czech Republic was criticized heavily. Without going into the complex structure of the citizenship law here, let me just mention the following. One of its consequences was that it made it in some cases quite complicated for Slovaks who permanently resided or even were born in the Czech lands to acquire the new Czech citizenship. Over 300,000 Czechoslovaks who lived permanently in the Czech lands became foreigners (with Slovak citizenship) on January 1, 1993. The difference between a national and a foreigner is substantial in a number of areas usually.

As far as education is concerned, the potentially dramatic consequences were diminished or even eliminated by an inter-state agreement on education between the Czech and Slovak Republics which came into force on the first day of the new states' existence.[49] The agreement set a one-year transition period during which Slovak citizens who attended Czech schools at the time of the federation's break-up were allowed to proceed as if they were nationals. Since then Slovak citizens with long term or permanent residence in the Czech Republic have been allowed to enrol in any school as if they were nationals. The truth is that some persons had difficulties obtaining residency permits. One has to recognize, however, that the new states made substantial effort to make it possible for citizens of the other state to attend educational institutions under convenient conditions.

Moreover, under the Czech educational act Czech *or* Slovak may be used as a language of communication in elementary and secondary schools.[50] Institutions of higher education do not discriminate against Slovak-speaking and -writing students in the Czech Republic either. The wide acceptance of Slovak pupils and students in mainstream Czech educational institutions is very significant since these are attended by them almost exclusively at present.

The Romany Minority

With on average very little educational status, Roma were not ready for the democratic changes of 1989 which introduced capitalism into Czechoslovakia. After 1989 many Roma were forced out, for instance, from the construction business by guest workers from the former Soviet Union who were willing to work for very little. The Romany community was simply very harshly hit by the changes thanks to which the educated gained and those with little education lost.

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[47] Gajdoš (1997), p. 87.

[48] This applies in particular to non-Romany Slovaks. On the situation of Roma see the appropriate section.

[49] Agreement No. 203/1993 of 29 October 1992.

[50] Law No. 29/1984 as ammended.

The arrival of democracy, however, also brought about the official recognition of Roma as a national minority in both parts of the Czechoslovak Federation.[51] Those who supposed that such a step would initiate some kind of great revival of Romany culture and language within the community were wrong. In the 1991 census on national minorities only about 33,000 persons declared to be of Romany nationality in the Czech lands and 75,802 in Slovakia. Meanwhile realistic estimates of the total size of the Romany community in 1991 were around 150,000 for the Czech lands and almost 300,000 for Slovakia. Some Romany leaders claimed even much higher numbers.

The census outcomes may have suggested that the majority of Roma more or less accepted the policy of assimilation which was promoted by the communist regime. Or another explanation for it, perhaps more probable, is that Roma traditionally try to conceal their identity in order to diminish discrimination and to confuse officials as to how large the Romany community really is and where it is located.

In any case, no such thing as a great revival of Romany language and culture took place in Czechoslovakia. This was in stark contradiction to the efforts of some prominent Romany intellectuals who immediately after 1989 emphasized the need to introduce classes in which the language of instruction would be Romany.[52] Promoters of this policy sometimes admitted that it would not in fact be greeted by most Roma.[53] A survey carried out by the Slovak Statistical Institute revealed that 80 percent of Romany respondents would not like their children to attend Romany-language schools (8 percent have would liked that, 12 percent did not know).[54]

To date there is no Romany-language elementary school in the Czech Republic or Slovakia and efforts are not made to establish one – neither by government, nor by Romany leaders. What Romany leaders along with some international organisations have criticized, however, is the high proportion of Roma in schools for the intellectually deficient. This problem persists in spite of the new assignment procedure that has been introduced after 1989. While under communism a district authority had the decisive power in the process of placing a child in a school for the intellectually deficient, since 1991 parents have had the last word in the procedure.[55] Still, the problem persists and seems to be a complex one, i.e. it cannot be blamed only on racial prejudice of Czech and Slovak teachers or psychologists who test children. In 1997 the Czech Minister of Education was assigned the task by Czech government to stop the too frequent assignment of Romany pupils in schools for the intellectually deficient.[56] Its effects have yet to be examined. Slovak authorities are also aware of the problem.

To improve the educational status of the Romany minority both Czech and Slovak Ministries of Education set up several preparatory classes in which – mainly – Romany pupils get ready for their enrolment in an elementary school. In 1998 there were 50 classes with 670 pupils in the Czech Republic and 64 classes with 807 pupils in Slovakia. Since the communist and postcommunist statistics on Roma in schools are not compatible, it is impossible to determine exactly what happened after 1989 with the Romany community in schools. Post 1989 data that are based on the subjective declaration of Romany nationality are essentially useless and may be perhaps be used as a curiosity but not for statistical purposes. Again, Romany parents enter Czech or Slovak in the Czech Republic and Slovak or Magyar ethnicity for their children in schools.

The problems that Roma face can hardly be tackled only by a policy of non-discrimination however important its continuous enforcement is. It is clear that some specific measures would have to deployed in order to decrease the division between Roma and non-Roma in the Czech and Slovak Republics. Some sort Czech and Slovak version of affirmative action exclusively for Roma does not seem to be a viable option for several reasons, however.

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[51] Resolution of Czech government No. 463 of 13 November 1991 and Resolution of Slovak government No. 153 of 9 April 1991.

[52] The demand for introduction of the Romany language into schools was also raised by the Romany Civic Initiative in its 1992 election prospectus.

[53] Bánom (1990), p. 7.

[54] Okáliová (1991), p. 139.

[55] See Decree of the Czech Ministry of Education No. 399/1991 of 13 September 1991.

[56] Resolution of Czech government No. 686 of 29 October 1997.

First, post-1989 statistics on Roma are to some extent useless for reasons that I have already mentioned and therefore it would be hard to target Roma as Roma, so to say. Second, affirmartive action explicitely in favor of Roma is politically unviable. This cannot be just explained by the existent racial prejudice against Roma. Affirmative action is often backed by arguments referring to past discrimination of a certain ethnic group. This would, of course, apply to Roma. One has to bear in mind, however, that for Czechs and Slovaks the notion of "past" is communism. Under communism Roma in fact enjoyed preferential treatment along with some other groups, such as members of the working class, for instance.

Czech as well as Slovak authorities decided to take another route. Almost all important measures that were essentially designed for Roma were phrased in ethnic-neutral terms. For instance, as I have already mentioned, preparatory classes for "pupils of disadvantaged social background" were opened in Czech and Slovak Republics. Or the Slovak government named an "officer for the resolution of problems of citizens that need specific assistance" in 1995. Even in view of these measures it does not seem that the situation of Roma in the Czech and Slovak Republics will improve in any significant sense in the near future.

Conclusion

Between 1945 and the end of 20th century a number of policies were adopted to provide for special linguistic accommodation of ethnic minorities, or, on the contrary, to assimilate or even expel them. While the German minority was transferred abroad and its remnant in Czechoslovakia was dispersed all over the country and eventually assimilated, the Ukrainian and Polish minorities enjoyed quite generous linguistic privileges including extensive networks of minority schools. This was eventually true also for the Magyar minority even though the initial plan was to transfer it abroad.

The official recognition of the Romany minority in 1989 after decades of assimilationist policies did not provide the solution to problems that this ethnic group suffers from, such as educational underachievement, high unemployment and it has, obviously, not removed racial discrimiantion either.

Under communism Roma did not suffer from unemployment because such a phenomenon did not exist. Also, their low educational status was not as significant since unqualified manual work was rewarded generously before 1989. One could, indeed, claim that their integration into and participation in the communist society was to an extent successful.

With the arrival of capitalism in Czechoslovakia, the previously largely irrelevant educational achievements of a person grew extremely important. Unemployment emerged and started rising and Roma, mostly persons with very low qualification, were hit very hard.

After 1989 the situation of the Romany community did not involve a political battle for minority language and culture as in the case of the Magyar minority in Slovakia. Roma have not really raised any substantial demands for the introduction of Romany language into schools, for instance. On the whole the Romany minority in the Czech Republic and Slovakia has been rather disorganized and as yet unable to effectively use international and domestic sources of support. The main agents of change will, therefore, remain national governments and international concern for Roma as a disadvantaged minority for some time to come.

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